Politics

Agencies asked to scrub federal government websites to remove diversity-related content

By Jennifer Jacobs, Alexander Tin, Kathryn Watson

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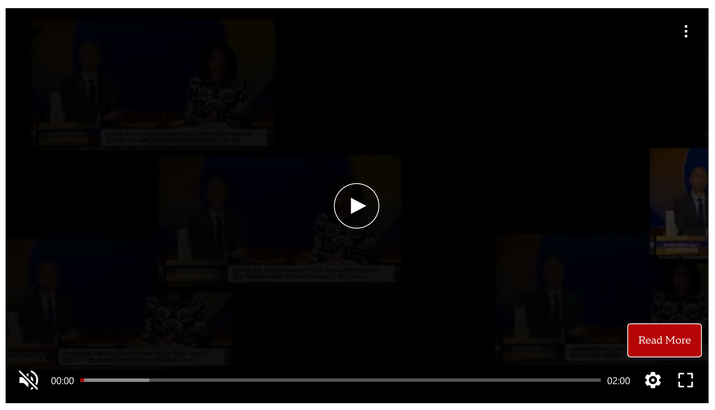
The Trump administration planned to scrub some federal government websites in order to remove content contrary to the president's thinking, administration officials told CBS News, and word spread quickly throughout Washington about actions that might be taken to alter the websites.

There was confusion about whether sites would be entirely shut down, but federal department and agency websites remained functional Friday.

"The agency websites are still up and running," White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt told CBS News.

Guidance from the Office of Personnel Management early last week instructed all federal agencies to take steps "no later than 5:00 p.m. EST on Wednesday" to "take down all outward facing media (websites, social media accounts, etc.) of DEIA offices." The directive referred to Jan. 22.

Some of the memo was misinterpreted by agencies and people who would be affected in Washington, aides said.

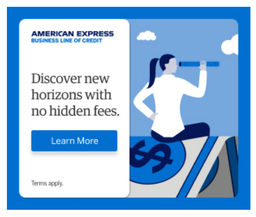


President Trump, asked by reporters in the Oval Office Friday if websites would be shut down to remove diversity-related content, replied, "If they want to scrub the websites, that's OK with me."

At the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, multiple federal health officials said that agency staff were racing Friday to meet OPM's 5 p.m. deadline to implement Mr. Trump's executive order that the federal government now only recognizes "two sexes, male and female."

The CDC took down much of its adult immunization guidance, which referenced transgender and nonbinary people as part of carefully crafted recommendations for some vaccines passed by a panel of the agency's outside advisers.

Web pages that could not be immediately reworded to strip out all mentions of gender, like those aimed at transgender people, were taken down to be reworked.



Other hospitals, nonprofits and health departments have also been affected. Letters obtained by CBS News sent to nonprofits and state and local health departments receiving federal health dollars left some grant recipients confused.

One letter suggested that all their staff and communications would also be forced to comply with the Trump administration's sweeping new rules banning gender from all their activities, like dropping the mention of pronouns from email signatures and removing gender from their websites as a condition of continuing to receive federal funds.

Another targeted mentions of diversity, equity and inclusion, saying that similar to federal rules, they also were now required to "immediately terminate, to the maximum extent, all programs, personnel, activities, or contracts promoting" those ideas "at every level and activity, regardless of your location or the citizenship of employees or contracts" supported by the funds.

Kathryn Watson contributed to this report.

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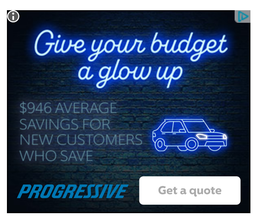

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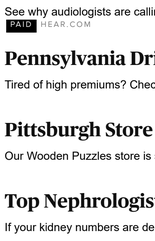

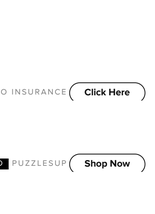

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